

The Examiner is requested to enter the following amended claims:

Claims 1-23 (previously canceled)

24. (previously presented) Apparatus for processing an unaged or partially aged beverage comprising a closed system wherein the closed system comprises a beverage aging wood product such that a beverage passing through said system contacts said wood product; wherein said beverage-aging wood product is prepared by the process of:

- (i) comminuting raw, untreated wood into granules;
- (ii) heating said granules to a temperature of from about 100° C to about 240° C for a period of at least one hour;
- (iii) contacting the granules with a solution of aqueous ethanol containing from about 50% to about 95% ethanol at a temperature of up to about 55° C;
- (iv) separating the granules from the solution; and
- (v) heating the granules to a temperature of up to about 220° C for a period of at least about 15 minutes.

25. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said beverage aging wood product is contained in an interchangeable cartridge.

26. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said apparatus comprises a pump for circulating said beverage in said system.

27. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said apparatus comprises an inlet for injecting gas or air into said system.

28. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said apparatus comprises a heat exchanger configured to control the temperature of a beverage in said system.

29. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said apparatus is configured to flush said wood product after a processing run.

30. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said apparatus comprises a filter configured to filter said beverage during or after the maturation processing.

31. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said apparatus comprises a valve for sampling said beverage during processing.

32. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said beverage is an ethanolic beverage.

33. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said beverage is a brown distilled spirit.

34. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said beverage is Bourbon, Scotch, Irish, rye, Canadian or other whiskey, rum, tequila, brandy, cognac, armagnac, liqueur, mescal, eau de vie, aguardiente, or shogu (shouchuu).

35. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 24, wherein said beverage is processed at a temperature of from about 70° to about 170° F.

36. (currently amended) Apparatus for processing an unaged or partially aged beverage, said apparatus comprising:

a closed system of piping for circulation of the beverage;

a pump for circulating said beverage through said closed system;

an inlet for injecting gas or air into said closed system;

a heat exchanger configured to control the temperature of a beverage in said system;

a filter configured to filter said beverage during or after processing;

a valve for sampling said beverage during processing; and

~~a container~~ an interchangeable cartridge for a beverage aging wood product connectable to the closed system by an inlet port and an outlet port in fluid communication with the closed system so that a beverage circulating in the closed system contacts the beverage aging wood product during use.

37. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein said container contains a beverage aging wood product prepared by the process of:

- (i) comminuting raw, untreated wood into granules;
- (ii) heating said granules to a temperature of from about 100° C to about 240° C for a period of at least one hour;
- (iii) contacting the granules with a solution of aqueous ethanol containing from about 50% to about 95% ethanol at a temperature of up to about 55° C;
- (iv) separating the granules from the solution; and
- (v) heating the granules to a temperature of up to about 220° C for a period of at least about 15 minutes.

38. (canceled)

39. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 38, further comprising a flush tank and piping configured to flush said wood product after a processing run.

40. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein said beverage is an ethanolic beverage.

41. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein said beverage is a brown distilled spirit.

42. (previously presented) The apparatus of claim 36, wherein said beverage is Bourbon, Scotch, Irish, rye, Canadian or other whiskey, rum, tequila, brandy, cognac, armagnac, liqueur, mescal, eau de vie, aguardiente, or shogu (shouchuu).